Do the activities teachers use in the classroom match students' preferences?

Nahum Samperio Sánchez[i]

Abstract

Activities are the backbone of the class since they influence many factors that lead to learning such as motivation, participation, students' involvement in class, and the classroom environment. This study aimed at identifying the type of activities students like to do in the classroom and the activities teachers frequently use in class. This study followed a quantitative research methodology with a qualitative component. Quantitative data was collected through a 54 Likert-scale items questionnaire, which explores classroom activities. Data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. Eight hundred and four students and thirty-one teachers of a Language Center at a university in Tijuana participated in the study. Findings indicate that teachers more frequently use grammar, reading, and listening activities while students favor listening, vocabulary, and grammar activities. Similarities and differences were found in the analysis. The qualitative component showed that students would like to include more speaking activities in their classes.

Keywords: *Activities, preference, classroom, speaking activities, grammar activities*

¿Las actividades que utilizan los profesores en el aula coinciden con las preferencias de los estudiantes?

Resumen

Las actividades que se realizan en el aula son la columna vertebral de la clase, ya que influyen en muchos factores que conducen al aprendizaje, tales como la motivación, la participación de los estudiantes en la clase y el ambiente del aula. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar el tipo de actividades que les gusta hacer a los estudiantes en el aula y las actividades que los profesores utilizan con frecuencia en clase. Este estudio siguió una metodología de investigación cuantitativa con un componente cualitativo. Los datos cuantitativos se recopilaron mediante un cuestionario de 54 ítems en escala Likert, que explora las actividades del aula. Los datos se analizaron con el programa informático *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS). En el estudio participaron ochocientos cuatro estudiantes y treinta y un profesores de un Centro de Idiomas de una universidad de Tijuana. Se encontraron similitudes y diferencias en el análisis, ya que los hallazgos indican que los maestros utilizan con mayor frecuencia actividades de gramática, lectura y comprensión auditiva, mientras que los estudiantes favorecen las actividades de comprensión auditiva, vocabulario y gramática. El componente cualitativo mostró que a los estudiantes les gustaría incluir más actividades de expresión oral en sus clases.

Palabras clave: *Actividades, preferencia, aula, actividades de conversación, actividades gramaticales.*

Introduction

Many internal and external factors contribute to learning of a foreign language. The activities that teachers decide to use in their daily teaching might be an important factor to consider. The inclusion, or not, of a variety of activities in the classroom might have a positive or negative impact on the student, the classroom environment, and language learning. The selection of good activities can make a class dynamic, interesting, or even enjoyable. Therefore, it can motivate students to attend classes and participate in class; additionally, they can help students gain confidence in the language use. On the other hand, the activities used in the classroom can also make the class extremely tedious, boring, unbearable, and can even push students to quit classes.

Teachers' lack of knowledge of students' perception of the procedures they use in class can have negative consequences. Thus, it is important to consider and analyze students' perception of the activities that teachers include in the classroom, and it is equally important to explore the extent to which teachers are aware of the importance of the selection and inclusion of activities in their daily practice.

This study set out to identify the activities that students enjoy doing in the classroom and the activities that teachers commonly use in their daily teaching. To increase motivation in the classroom, Tian (2005) suggests promoting student curiosity by using a variety of teaching methods and activities. Therefore, knowing students' preferences for activities might have pedagogical implications such as enhancing motivation once students are already taking the class, creating an enjoyable atmosphere, and even generating intrinsic motivation for continuing studying the language further than compulsory classes.

According to Makel and Plucker (2014), replication studies are not common but they are needed. Thus, the purpose of this study was to replicate on a larger scale and extend the study of Samperio (2017) who found a mismatch between teachers' frequently used activities and students' preference for activities.

Literature review

Hubbard, Jones, Thornton, and Wheeler (1991) explain that teaching has a hierarchical system that comprehends the approach, the method, and the techniques. Hubbard et. al. (1991, p. 31) claim that "different approaches may share the same techniques and even the same methods, and different methods may share the same techniques". That is, techniques cannot be attributed to a single method or approach. Therefore, despite the teaching method, a technique is what teachers use to help students understand, practice, memorize, and recall information. In this sense, it is feasible to understand techniques as activities since activities also fulfill a purpose. Richards and Schmidt (2010) define teaching activities as "any classroom procedure that requires students to use and practice their available language resources" (p. 9). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), techniques refer to virtually everything students do in the classroom. Consequently, an activity represents what the student will do with the information that the teacher provides with a learning purpose.

An activity may include a series of steps that the student must follow to achieve the learning objective; Breen (1987) defines it as a task. According to Breen, a task has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specific work procedure, and a series of results for those who perform the task. This task usually requires a series of instructions to carry it out properly. As stated by Nunan (1989), an effective task is a series of activities that have an objective, new information, a process, a result, and an evaluation. According to Willis (1996) "tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the student for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome" (p. 23). Nunan (2004) uses the word 'task' instead of 'activity'. He defines a task as "a piece of classroom work which involves students in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (p. 10). In this way, Nunan sees the activities as part of a task. That is to say, activities come in chains, and they rarely come in isolation; they are often in groups included in procedures. For example, listening to a recording might be preceded by looking at pictures or reading questions and what comes after is the revising of the answers, or comparing answers with classmates.

The activities students do in the classroom can help them in the process of learning in many ways. Reducing anxiety and overcoming fear or shyness, keeping or raising motivation, and practicing the language are some of the ways in which the selection of activities can

help. Ur (1988) suggests that there are features in activities that can increase students' motivation, interest, and attention. Riddell (2003) states that activities should vary from lesson to lesson and that they need to be carefully selected, relevant and interesting. However, it is difficult to have a set of features in activities since each activity works differently in students, and they might have a different effect on each one. For instance, whereas a student might enjoy having class presentations, another might be anxious about them. Thus, students bring their individual characteristics, which will affect their perception of activities.

Teachers' choice of activities is greatly influenced by teaching styles and teachers' beliefs. According to Williams and Burden (1997), "teachers' deep-rooted beliefs about how languages are learned will pervade their classroom actions more than a particular methodology they are told to adopt or course book they follow" (p. 57). They also claim that teachers' beliefs "will influence their actions in the classroom" (pp. 48–49). That is, what teachers believe about language learning would influence their choice for activities. Therefore, if a teacher is fond of grammar activities, they will likely favor activities that promote the learning and use of grammar. Likewise, if a teacher believes that oral communication is necessary, they will favor speaking activities. According to Richards and Lockhart (1994), teachers develop their beliefs over time from the way they were taught and from their experience of what works well with students, through practice in addition to personality factors, research or principles derived from various approaches or methods.

What students lack, need, and want (Hutchinson & Waters 1987) are three factors that might determine students' perception and expectations of the language learning process. Consequently, lacks, needs and wants of the language might control students' preference for activities. Nonetheless, what they want to do with the language correlates with the activities students will prefer to do. When activities satisfy what they want, students will enjoy activities and the environment in the classroom, and it will probably enhance motivation and participation. Roever and Duffy (2005) discovered that some reasons for students quitting their study of language were the amount of work, the inadequate placement level, and the dissatisfaction with the teaching methodologies and content of the language class.

Prior Work

Research conducted in regards to students' and teachers' perceptions of about activities has shed light on the procedures that students prefer, enjoy, or favor in class. Gholami and Reza (2013) conducted research on language learning preferences. They researched activities for learning, error correction, and assessment. They discovered a mismatch between the activities students enjoy having in class and the ones teachers use. In a similar way, Al-Mekhlafi and Seyabi (2017) investigated the perceptions of EFL students regarding their most preferred classroom activities. They reported differences between advanced and beginner students' preference for activities.

Research has also been conducted with single activities. For example, Chou (2014) investigated how activities such as games, songs, and stories helped and motivated 72 Taiwanese EFL primary school pupils (between the ages of 8 and 11) to learn English vocabulary. Chou discovered a positive effect on students' motivation to increase their English vocabulary. Studies conducted on activities on isolated skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing have shown varied results; however, most researchers have examined activities globally in the classroom. Weger-Guntharp (2008) investigated the students' preferences for these skill-based activities, and he discovered that students favored listening and speaking activities the most, and grammar activities the least. As stated before, this might be due to the confidence they have in their language level.

The search for elements that can help students reach success in language learning has been varied and plentiful. Findings have shown similarities and differences in students' and teachers' perceptions of classroom activities. It is important to know that many factors contribute to the preference students have for certain activities such as the level, students' personality, student's motivation for studying the language, or teacher's methodology. The search for activities that teachers should include in the classroom with beneficial effects on students' learning is still ongoing; it should continue producing findings that can aid teachers in developing the best learning conditions for their students.

Methodology

This study aimed to identify the preferences that students have for the activities that teachers use in their everyday teaching. A mixed-methods approach was used that included qualitative and quantitative data collection. The study also expected to find a match between the activities students prefer to have in the classroom and the ones teachers include in the classroom. With this study, the researchers attempt to answer the following questions:

1.   Do students prefer a specific type of activities?

2.   How often do teachers include in the classroom activities that students prefer?

3.   Do the activities teachers use match students' preference for activities in class?

Participants

In this study, eight hundred and four students, and thirty-one teachers participated. The sample included not only university students but also people from the general community who were taking English lessons during the study in the language center.

The questionnaire

Although the number of activities that can be used in class may vary considerably in different teaching contexts (for example, the level, the topic, the type of course), the instrument was developed considering activities commonly used in language teaching. The activities included in the questionnaire represent a sample of the activities that teachers use.

A 54-item Likert questionnaire adapted from Samperio's questionnaire (2017) was used to collect numerical data. The questionnaire explored classroom activities in seven categories: reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary, and other activities. Table 1 shows items divided into categories. Activities included in each category practice the skill that it was named after. The "other activities" category included activities that did not fit in any of the previous categories such as playing games.

The questionnaire measured frequency in 5 points: always, usually, sometimes, occasionally, and never. Since the intention was to know the activities teachers had never used, on the questionnaire, teachers marked activities they had never done in class before.

Table 1. Items of the questionnaire in categories

Category	Items on the questionnaire	Number of items
Grammar	1-7	7
Listening	8-14	7
Speaking	15-26	12
Reading	27-37	11
Writing	38-42	5
Vocabulary	43-49	7
Other activities	50-54	5

The students' questionnaire included the same activities in order to identify a possible match between teachers' and students' answers. The questionnaire for students was in Spanish since it was for students with any level of English in the Language Center. The survey measured the degree of preference in terms of activities students like to do in the classroom. It is important to note that following Spratt (1999) the word "preference" is used alternatively as "like" in this study. The scale measured 5 points by using the expression "*in the English class, I like*" a lot, some, more or less, a little, or not at all, and never done before.

A qualitative component was included in the questionnaires in form of a question that sought for activities not mentioned in the questionnaire. In these questions, learners could state the activities they wanted to have in class.

Results

General descriptive statistics

The study was conducted with 804 students and 31 teachers from different levels of English at the Language Center. Descriptive statistics of the students' data show that 65.4 % (527) are female students and 34.6 % (277) are male students. Concerning the level of English of students, data indicates that 27.2% belonged to level 1, 23.3% to the level 2, 22.0% to the level 3, 15% to the level 4.1 % to the level 5, and 4.1% 27 to the level 6. Additionally, a group

of students learning English as a requirement to exit the university also answered the questionnaire, and it represented 4.2%.

Activities that students prefer to do in the English class

Analysis of quartiles showed that activities in the third quartile represent the activities with the highest mean score, which means activities with the highest preference. On Table 2, we can observe the activities students prefer to do in the English classroom.

Table 2.The most preferred activities by students arranged in descending order

Act	Category	Description of the activity	Mean	SD
22	Speaking	practice pronunciation by repeating after the teacher or recordings	5.37	.980
42	Writing	correct my writing (correct spelling, grammar, punctuation).	5.36	1.057
49	Vocabulary	match vocabulary with its meaning	5.33	1.061
5	Grammar	do grammar exercises (fill in the blanks or complete sentences, dialogs, order sentences, matching)	5.31	.952
8	Listening	listen to recordings, and do exercises such as multiple choice questions, fill in the blanks, completing, matching, ordering, true or false, etc.	5.30	1.047
12	Listening	listen to recordings and repeat words, sentences, questions, sounds, intonation, pronunciation, etc.	5.28	1.088
33	Reading	read and answer exercises (fill in the blanks, matching, true and false, etc.)	5.24	1.043
6	Grammar	write examples (sentences, questions, etc.) of a new grammar structure	5.21	.902
10	Listening	listen to recordings and identify sounds, word stress, intonation, pronunciation, etc.	5.20	1.155
30	Reading	read and look up unknown words in a dictionary on the internet	5.17	1.115
48	Vocabulary	review vocabulary	5.16	1.102

Table 2 shows that learners favored listening, reading, and grammar activities in their classes. Interestingly, the activity with the highest mean score is a speaking activity, which involves pronunciation. It is possible to speculate that students might like to have the correct pronunciation of the words they use. Likewise, activity 12 practices not only the correct pronunciation but also the intonation of words and sentences through listening input. This would suggest that it is important for students to produce accurate language not only in the form but also with an accurate pronunciation.

An analysis of activities grouped into categories was conducted to identify what type of activities students would favor the most. Results showed that students reported a significant preference for listening activities (M=5.02) followed by vocabulary /(M=4.89), and grammar (M= 4.84) activities. In contrast, writing (M=4.37), speaking (M=4.39), and other activities(M=4.55) are the least preferred by students. Data analysis allowed us to observe that students do not favor speaking activities. It can also be observed in Table 2 that 3 out of the eleven are listening activities.

Activities that teachers use in class

Cronbach's alpha test of the questionnaire's reliability indicated a consistency at a global level of .93. Gliem and Gliem (2003) state that the closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. Thus, it shows the structural validity of the questionnaire. Mean scores of activities used by teachers in the classroom were obtained in order to identify the activities that are frequently used and the least frequently used in the classroom. Data analyses indicated that 10 activities were used at high frequency rate (M=5.1 or higher) and nine activities at low frequency rate (M=4.4 or lower). Table 3 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the activities that teachers frequently use, and the category they belong to.

Table 3. The most frequently used activities by teachers arranged in descending order

Act	Category	Description of the activity	M	SD
6	Grammar	write examples (sentences, questions, etc.) of a new grammar structure seen	5.65	.709
33	Reading	read and answer exercises (fill in the blanks, matching, true and false, etc.)	5.58	.672
5	Grammar	do grammar exercises (fill in the blanks or complete sentences, dialogs, order sentences, matching)	5.48	.769
16	Speaking	ask and answer questions in pairs (to practice a structure, chit chat, etc.)	5.48	.677
29	Reading	read aloud for the class (not the teacher) to listen	5.45	.768
39	Writing	write sentences paragraphs, stories, dialogs, individually	5.35	.709
1	Grammar	analyze grammatical rules from charts, reading passages	5.32	.832
8	Listening	listen to recordings, and do exercises such as multiple choice questions, fill in the blanks, completing, matching, ordering, true or false, etc.	5.19	.946
48	Vocabulary	review vocabulary seen in prior classes	5.19	.946

| 30 | **Reading** | read and look up unknown words in a dictionary on the internet | 5.16 | .969 |

Among the ten activities that teachers frequently use, figures in table 5 show that grammar and reading activities are included frequently by teachers. Vocabulary, listening, writing, and speaking activities were also included among this set of data. Interestingly, the use of speaking activities is scarce.

Activities grouped in categories were also analyzed. Data in Table 6 indicate that teachers highly use grammar (M=5.02), reading (M=4.89) and listening (M=4.75) activities. In contrast, they use other activities less often (M=4.54), vocabulary (M=4.60), writing (M=4.70), and speaking (M=4.73) activities.

Activities students like and activities teachers use in the classroom

Teachers reported using most of the activities in the questionnaire in class. However, only four teachers reported that they had never used a few of the activities included in the questionnaire. In order to identify a difference in the frequency of strategy use and the preferences students have for such activities, a t-test for independent samples was conducted. Table 4 shows the results of the t-test for independent samples between teachers and students.

Table 4. T-test for independent samples between teachers and students

	t	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Grammar	-1.6	.117	-.182	.116
Listening	1.8	.076	.267	.150
Speaking	-2.1	*.035*	-.336	.159
Reading	-1.7	.090	-.243	.143
Writing	-1.9	.058	-.342	.180
Vocabulary	1.8	.077	.291	.164
Other Activities	.031	.976	.006	.198

Results of the t-test show that only speaking activities have a statistically significant difference. That is, teachers use more speaking activities in class than what students would like like.

In order to observe this match, activities compared at a single level were graphed. Figures 1 and 2 show a comparison chart between the activities that students like to do in class and the frequency in which teachers use these activities. Despite the apparent differences in the graphs, sixteen activities show a greater difference: listening activities 10 and 14, speaking activities 18, 19, 23, 24, and 25; reading activities 29, 32, and 37; writing activities 38, 39 and 42; vocabulary activities 46 and 49; and "other activity" 52.
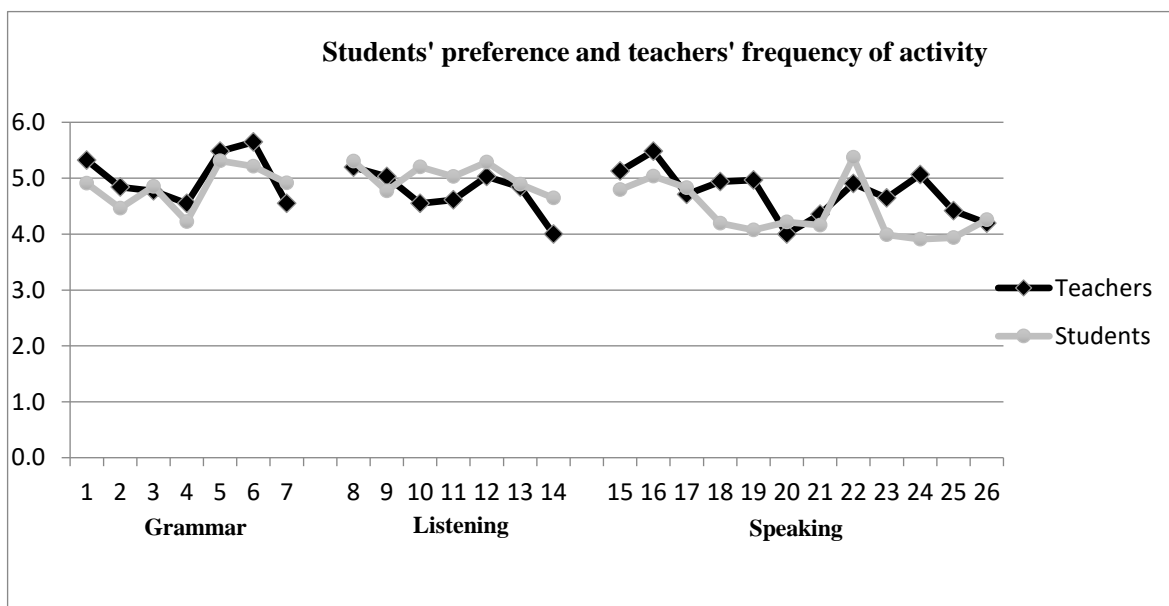

Figure 1. Students' preference for activities and Teachers' frequency of activity use of grammar, listening, and speaking activities

The questionnaire included an open question that could indicate what activities (not mentioned in the questionnaire) students would like to have in the classroom. This, somehow, complements and reinforces what students reported as never done in class. One hundred and one observations that expressed activities for language learning were gathered and grouped in skills and sub-skills. Although some of the activities reported by students were included in the questionnaires, they were quantified in order to observe their preference for activities and to be able to contrast with numerical data of the questionnaire analyzed.

Interestingly, speaking activities were highly reported as activities students would like to have in the classroom. Even though many of the activities reported by students in terms of speaking were included in the questionnaire, students reported them as activities they would like to have in class. That is, students either did not clearly identify the activities in the questionnaire or they wanted to emphasize the desire to include more speaking in their
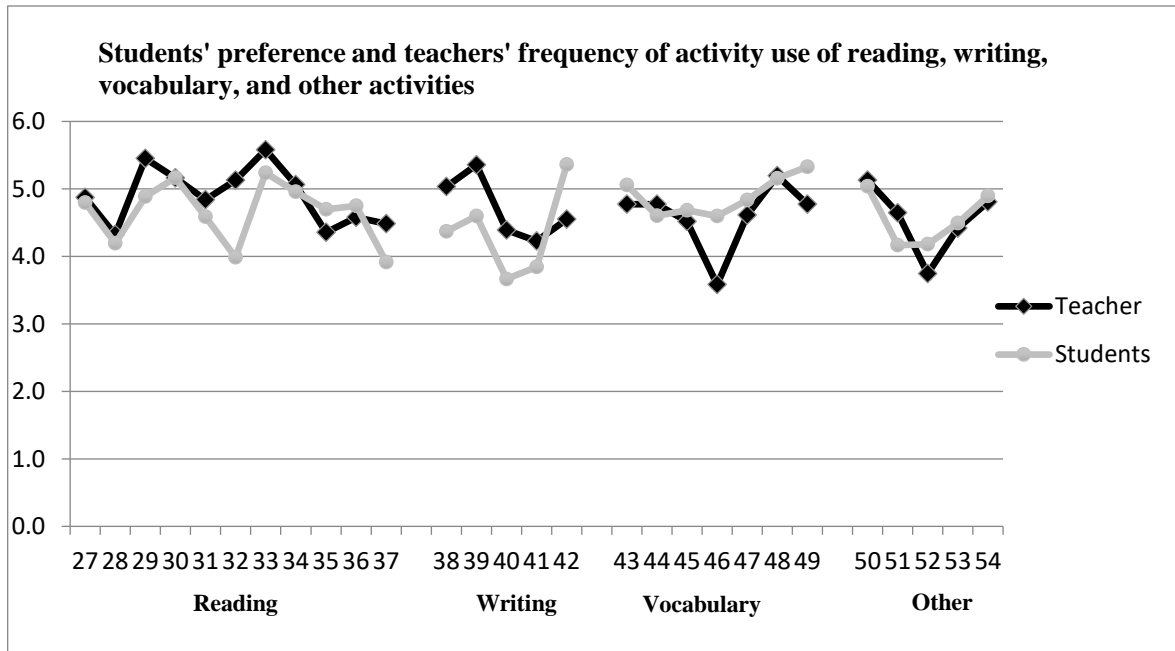
Figure 2. Students' preference for activities and Teachers' frequency of activity use of Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, and Other activities

lessons. Therefore, this finding does not coincide with the results of the quantitative findings.

Discussion

Activities that students prefer to do in the classroom

Data analyses provided interesting findings. Activities analyzed in categories showed that students favored listening activities. In contrast, they do not enjoy having writing activities. Findings in the qualitative component of the questionnaire support the preference. Learners reported 21 listening activities, which included dictation, watching movies and videos, and having native speakers as guests to listen to them. Additionally, students reported having classes completely in English, which also suggests that they enjoy listening to the English language.

The preference students have for listening activities might reside on their perception of what is more difficult in language learning. If they find developing the listening skill difficult, they might tend to favor activities that help them practice listening. The act of listening is wholly dependent on the ability to comprehend the speaker, and the mastering of the accent

of a foreign language needs practice. When listening, students need to comprehend what the speakers are saying. Additionally, students need to deal with the speed, accent, pronunciation, enunciation, grammar, and vocabulary of the speaker; thus, large amounts of practice are needed.

When activities were analyzed individually, out of the 11 most preferred activities by students, three belong to the listening category. Interestingly, the three listening activities reflect activities that texts books promote, for instance, listening to recordings and doing exercises, listening and repeating, and listening and identifying sounds. It seems that teachers delegate the practice of the listening skill to the activities in textbooks.

The preference for listening activities might have a motivational factor in students, which concurs with Chou (2014) who found a positive effect of listening activities in motivation. Findings in this set of data also coincide with Weger-Guntharp's findings (2008) who reported that students had a preference for listening and speaking activities. Nonetheless, researchers have not reported similar findings. This might be attributed to the goals of this research that sought preferences for activities that represent the learning or practice of language skills.

Activities grouped in categories also showed that students found vocabulary activities enjoyable. It can be said that vocabulary is entirely correlated to listening comprehension. A lack of vocabulary might cause breakdowns not only in listening but also in speaking. Most students seek to communicate in the target language for which vocabulary is not only important but also necessary. It might be feasible to believe that students also favor vocabulary activities because they want to feel they can comprehend what they listen. Nation (1990) claims that although the learning of vocabulary is not an end, it helps in the development of skills in language learning. Among the 11 activities that students preferred, two activities belong to the vocabulary category. Matching vocabulary words with their meaning and reviewing vocabulary seems to be highly enjoyed by students.

The activities teachers frequently use in the language classroom

Choosing activities to include in the classroom is a difficult task, and many factors contribute to this choice. Data Analysis indicated that teachers use grammar activities more frequently, followed by reading and listening activities. This finding concurs with the findings

of Andrews (2003) who discovered that teachers favor teaching grammar inductively. He suggests that teachers tend to favor grammar activities because they have a relatively high level of explicit knowledge of grammar. Findings in this study also match Borg's (2006) findings who also discovered that teachers generally value and promote grammar in their work. Teachers frequently use grammar activities based on their perceptions. Farrell and Lim (2005) suggested that the teaching of grammar is influenced by the teachers' views about language learning and what their students need and want. A possible explanation is the teacher's teaching style, which might be correlated to their previous learning experiences and their teaching beliefs. Although every teacher has a different way of teaching grammar, teachers might believe that the formal study of grammar is necessary to master a foreign or second language. According to Andrews (2007), teachers' own knowledge about grammar contributes to the instructional decisions they make.

The use of the communicative approach has challenged the teaching of grammar, and whether implicitly or explicitly taught, it always takes part in most language learning classrooms; therefore, it is included in most of the textbooks for English language learning. Another possible reason for the inclusion of grammar activities more frequently is that textbooks are part of the daily teaching in most institutions because they can provide lessons with many advantages. This is reflected in the analysis of the nine activities with the highest mean score. Doing grammar exercises such as filling in the blanks and writing examples with the new grammar structure are frequently included in the classroom practice because they are commonly included in textbooks. One of the advantages of using a textbook is the variety of activities and resources that they offer to teachers; however, according to Richards (2001), this can also be a disadvantage since it can deskill teachers. In other words, they hinder teachers from implementing activities according to students' needs. Richards explains that teachers' primary function is to use materials and activities prepared by others. It is important to note that just as no methodology is perfect, no textbook will completely suit a language program. Of course, the teacher decides whether to use activities included in the textbook or not based on different reasons, which have not been explored in detail in this study.

On the list of the most frequently used activities in the classroom reported by teachers, three activities belong to the reading category. The use of a textbook might also explain the

use of these activities; for example, item 33 (reading passages and answering exercises) is the most common practice to check comprehension in textbooks. One of the most common methods to assess comprehension in reading is the comprehension questions.

Reading is a receptive ability that is usually conducted in private and in silence. However, teachers, such as the ones who participated in this study, have students read aloud for other students to listen, and perhaps for teachers to give feedback on pronunciation. Although the purpose of using activities was not explored in this study, it is feasible to believe that teachers use reading aloud to improve pronunciation rather than comprehension.

It is interesting to observe that speaking and writing activities were not ranked as frequently used by teachers despite the institution's commitment to teach students to communicate in both written and oral forms.

Students' preference for activities versus the activities that teachers use

A match between what students like and what teachers do in the classroom would be beneficial in many ways: the environment, motivation, language achievement, etc.; however, a match may not always be attainable. It would be difficult to fulfill all students' likes and desires for activities in language learning.

Data analysis indicated no statistically significant difference in most categories of activities. That is, the activities that teachers use to satisfy what students like to do in the classroom; however, a statistically significant difference was found in speaking activities. An explanation for the mismatch between the frequency in which teachers include speaking activities and students the preference students have for speaking activities might be the perception and value of the speaking skill teachers and students have.

For students, speaking activities might represent a source of anxiety especially if they are exposed to other students. Young (1990, p. 539) claims, "Speaking in the foreign language is often cited by students as their most anxiety-producing experience". Anxiety in speaking can be caused by factors such as difficulty to express a message and the idea of being judged unfavorably by their counterparts when making mistakes. This perception is triggered by their individual differences such as personality, emotions, or previous learning experiences.

Alpert and Haber (1960) explain that there is facilitating and debilitating anxiety. The former raises students' motivation whereas the latter motivates the student to withdraw from the language task and leads them to adopt avoidance behaviors (Scovel, 1978). Debilitating anxiety might be caused by activities such as giving individual and oral presentations (items 18 and 19), having discussions or debates in class (item 21) or performing role-plays in front of the class (item 26) which are activities found on the least preferred activities by students.

For teachers, including speaking activities in the classroom provides the student with many opportunities to speak in the target language and thereby learn many linguistic elements that need to be gradually learned. Lackman (2010) lists speaking subskills that students need to develop in speaking such as fluency, accuracy, functions, appropriacy, turn taking, discourse, and markers, among others. Such subskills are practiced in varied speaking activities, and students gradually develop them with the feedback of the teacher and constant practice.

According to Martinez-Flor, Usó-Juan & Alcón (2006), "Speaking in a second language (L2) has been considered the most challenging of the four skills, given the fact that it involves a complex process of constructing meaning" (p. 139). Therefore, teachers might highly value speaking activities due to the benefit of developing the speaking skill. Teachers are speakers of the language, and they know the importance of developing the speaking skill. Consequently, they help students develop skills that they will use in real life; however, activities such as individual or group presentations do not represent common practices in real life. This finding concurs with Huang and Hu (2016) who conducted research on classroom activities. They discovered that 52.5% of their sample could not perceive speaking activities as interesting. Therefore, they might not perceive real learning in such activities because they are not receiving new input that can increase their learning. Thus, grammar activities become interesting and highly valued by students because they feel they are learning and can see their language knowledge is increasing when they receive new structures.

It is important to note that skills in language learning cannot be taught in isolation. Golkova and Hubackova (2014) explain that "Productive skills would not exist without the

support of receptive ones" (p. 480). They also explain that "receptive skills usually come first and they should be followed by practical application of productive ones" (p. 478).

Conclusion

This research sought after identifying students' preference for activities and teachers' frequency of activity use. Findings have indicated similarities and differences between the frequency in which teacher include activities in the classroom and the preference students have for the activities that teachers use in the classroom. Results showed that students have a higher preference for listening, vocabulary, and grammar activities whereas teachers tend to include in the classroom grammar, listening, and speaking activities more frequently. Qualitative results showed no statistically significant difference in most categories of activities with the exception of speaking activities. Nonetheless, quantitative data suggests students would like teachers to include more activities that help them practice speaking.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of the usefulness, enjoyment, practicality, or benefits of activities depend much on different variables, which we did not address in this study. On the students' side, their personality, motivation for learning, previous learning experiences, etc. might affect their preference for activities in the classroom; on the teachers' side, their teaching styles, teaching beliefs, or even their previous language learning experience would highly influence their decisions on the choice for activities to include in the classroom. However, findings in this study showed that, although not a perfect one, there is a match between the activities students like to do and the activities teachers choose to include in their daily teaching. This match might contribute to developing an enjoyable environment, higher participation, more students' involvement, and the impulse for learners to continue in their journey of language learning.

References

Al-Mekhlafi, A.M., & Seyabi, F.A. (2017). An Investigation of College Students' Preferred Classroom Activities in an EFL Context. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*. 4(2), 231-252.

Alpert, R. & Haber, R.N. (1960). Anxiety in academic achievement situations. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 61, 207- 215.

Andrews, S. (2003). Just like instant noodles. L2 teachers and their beliefs about grammar pedagogy, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *9*(4), 351-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/1354060032000097253

Andrews, S. (2007). *Teacher language awareness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497643

Borg, S. (2006). *Teacher cognition and language education: Research and practice*. London, England: Continuum.

Breen, M.P. (1987). Learner contributions to task design. In C.N. Candlin & D. Murphy (eds.), *Lancaster Practical Papers in English Language Education*: Vol. 7. Language learning tasks (pp. 23-46). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Chou, M. (2014). Assessing English vocabulary and enhancing young English as a foreign language (EFL) students' motivation through games, songs, and stories. *Education 3-13*, *42*(3), 284-297. doi: 10.1080/03004279.2012.680899

Farrell, T.S.C. & Lim, P.C.P. (2005). Conceptions of grammar teaching: A case study of teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. *TESL-EJ*, *9*(2), 1-13.

Gholami, M.A. & Reza, A.M. (2013). EFL Students' learning preference At Islamic Azad University Hamedan Branch. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 93, 102-106.

Gliem, J. & Gliem, R. (2003). Calculating, interpreting, and reporting Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for Likert-type scales. *Midwest Research to Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education*. Retrieved from http://www.alumni-osu.org/midwest/midwest%20papers/Gliem%20&%20Gliem

Golkova, D. & Hubackova, S. (2014). Productive skills in second language learning. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 143, 477–481.

Weger-Guntharp, H.D (2008). *Learner motivations and preferences: Realities in the language classrooms*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

Huang, X. & Hu, X. (2016). Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Classroom Activities Commonly Used in English Speaking Classes. *Higher Education Studies*, *6*(1), 87-100.

Hubbard, P., Jones, H., Thornton, B. & Wheeler, R. (1991). *A Training Course for TEFL*. Oxford: University Press.

Hutchinson, T. & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lackman, K. (2010). Teaching speaking sub-skills. Available at: http://www.kenlackman.com/files/speakingsubskillshandout13poland_2_.pdf.

Makel, M.C., & Plucker, J.A. (2014). Facts are more important than novelty: Replication in the educational sciences, *Educational Researcher*, *43*(6), 304-316.

Martinez-Flor, A., Usó-Juan, E. & Alcón Soler, E. (2006). Towards acquiring communicative competence through speaking. In Esther Usó-Juan & Alicia Martínez-Flor (eds.) *Current trends in the development and teaching of the four language skills*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Nation, P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J.C. (2001). The role of textbooks in a language program. *PAC Journal*, *1*(1), 41-64.

Richards, J.C. & Lockhart, C. (1994). Teacher development through peer observation. *TESOL Journal* 7 (2), 7-10.

Richards, J.C. & Rodgers, T. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (2nd edition), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J.C. & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (4th ed.). London, UK: Routledge.

Riddell, D. (2003). *Teaching English as a foreign/second language*. London, UK: Bookpoint.

Roever, C., & Duffy, L. (2005). Review of the Diploma in Modern Languages at the University of Melbourne. *Melbourne*, 35.

Samperio, N. (2017). Discovering students' preference for classroom activities and teachers' frequency of activity use. *Colombian applied Linguistic Journal*, *19*(1), 51-66.

Scovel, T, (1978). The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. *Language Learning*, *28*(1), 129-142.

Spratt, M. (1999). How good are we at knowing what students like? *System*, *27*(2), 141- 155.

Tian, J. (2005). Classroom language teaching and students motivation. *CELEAL Journal*, *28* (2), 90-94.

Ur, P. (1988). *Grammar Practice Activities: A Practice Guide for Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, M., and Burden, R. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. Addison Wesley Longman.

Young, D. J. (1990). An Investigation of Students' Perspectives on Anxiety and Speaking. *Foreign Language Annals*, *23*, 539-53.

---

[i] Doctor y Maestro en la Enseñanza del idioma inglés por la universidad de Southampton, Reino Unido. Cuenta con una licenciatura en la docencia del idioma inglés por la Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. Es coordinador de la licenciatura de Enseñanza de Lenguas y profesor-investigador; además, es candidato a investigador en el Sistema Nacional de Investigadores (SNI). También, es participante del Cuerpo Académico de Política Lingüística y Enseñanza de Lenguas en la UABC. Correo electrónico: nahum@uabc.edu.mx